

Elevating Your *Mood* For A Happier You

BY BARBI WALKER

The holidays are over and the stress that normally accompanies them is behind us too. But sometimes a little melancholy lingers, leaving us feeling the blahs. So if you find yourself feeling a little, I don't know...meh about things, then we have just the right tips for boosting your mood.

This too shall pass

Boosting your mood starts with patience. Take a deep breath and remember it won't last. The blues are a natural part of life, as the experts point out.

"Everyone gets depressed," says Dr. Carl Hammerschlag, M.D., a Paradise Valley psychiatrist and authority in the science of psychoneuroimmunology (mind, body, spirit medicine). "Recognize it's gonna pass and own what it is you are feeling."

By being realistic and accepting of yourself and your current mood, you can prevent making yourself feel worse, and shorten the time you feel down. Dr. Leslie Seppinni, a doctor of clinical psychology, agrees. "Take the moment for what it is—a moment."

So rather than rushing to conclusions about your blahs, sit back and relax with a cup of tea or a good book, and remind yourself that it's temporary.

Music soothes the soul

Try listening to some music that moves you—it's another great way to change your emotions. By creating playlists of music that give you a positive connection, you can elevate your mood, according to Dr. Joseph Cardillo, co-author of *Your Playlist Can Change Your Life*. Along with Galina Mindlin, MD, PhD, assistant professor of psychiatry at Columbia University, and Don Duroseau, a cognitive neuroscientist, Dr. Cardillo explains how music affects our moods and how to make playlists for a chemical-free "feel-good" prescription.

"Music can affect your mood instantly," says Dr. Cardillo.

The tempo of the music, the message of the lyrics, and the memories you have in connection with the song all play an important part on how the music can make you feel," he says.

Take good care of yourself

Research has proven that taking care of your physical health is also paramount to mental health. This means getting enough sleep, eating well, exercising—all the things we know we should do and need to do when experiencing the blahs.

A simple way to add more oomph to your mood is munch on a handful of nuts. Omega-3s, found in foods like fish and walnuts, are essential fatty acids that our body cannot make on its own, and a key nutrient our body needs. According to an article in *Scientific American*, scientists are seeing a possible link to depressive behavior and diets low in omega-3s.

The Mediterranean diet, which has been shown to improve heart health, may be the best way to eat for both body and mind health. According to Deepak Chopra, M.D., co-founder of the Chopra Center for Wellbeing, one recent large scale study suggests people who eat a Mediterranean diet were 30 percent less likely to suffer from depression. The findings are based on a five-year study of almost 3,500 people in London who strictly ate a Mediterranean diet. Scientists think the foods found in this type of diet may work together to balance moods—rich omega-3 foods, olive oil, nuts, fatty fish, and high-antioxidant fresh vegetables and fruits are important nutrients in protecting against depression.

Walk | hike

Getting outside and reconnecting with nature is one of the surest ways to boost your mood. Even a brief 10- or 15-minute walk does wonders for the spirit.

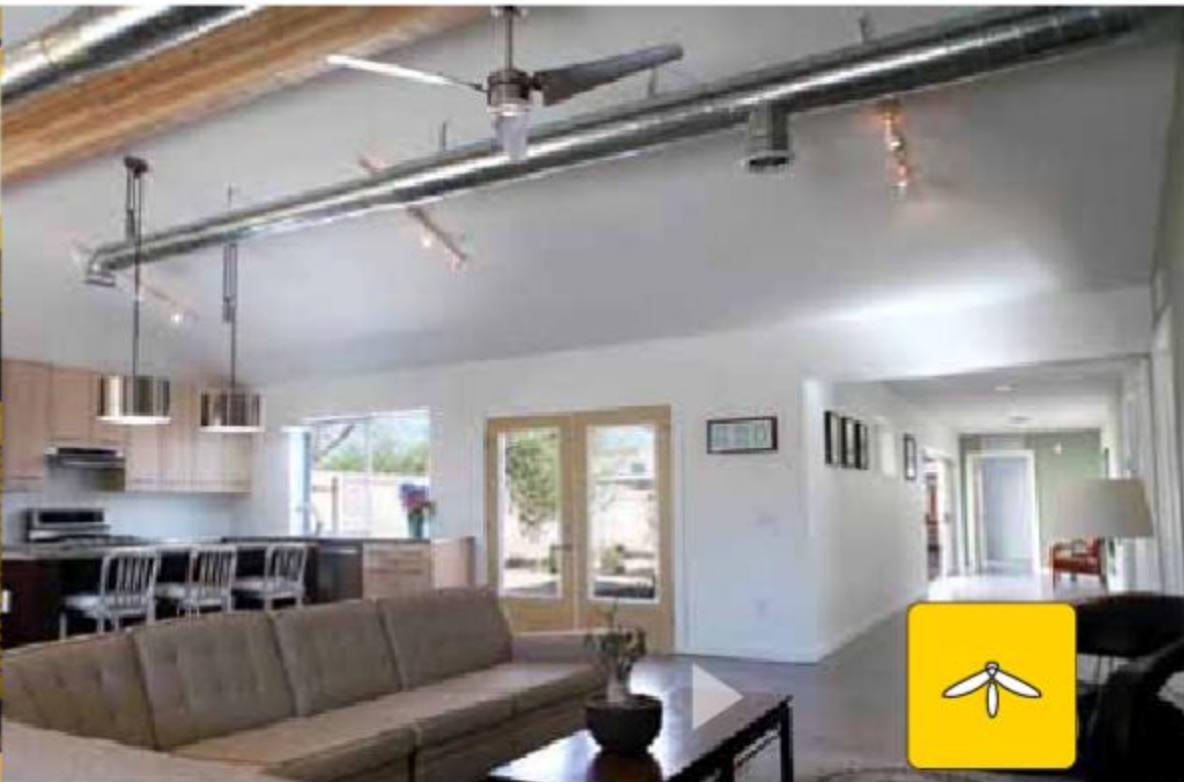
"Just being outside is a self-soothing environment," says

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Seppinni. By going outside, you are stripped away of any distracting elements found at home or work. A walk relaxes you because walking is relaxing," Seppinni adds.

And walking with a companion doubles the benefits by connecting with others, an important element in keeping your mood elevated.

Chat away—it's good for the soul

Sometimes opening up and talking with friends is on the top of experts' lists for lifting your mood.

In her book, *Better Each Day: 365 Expert Tips for a Healthier, Happier You*, health and wellness journalist Jessica Cassity has compiled advice from experts in the field.

Cassity reports that Matthias R. Mehl, PhD, assistant professor in the department of psychology at the University of Arizona, says people who talk more are more likely to be happy.

Amanda E. B. Bryan, M.A., a clinical psychology doctoral student at University of Arizona, agrees. "Getting empathy and compassion has a powerful impact on our mental health," she says. "The antidote to feeling low is to continue doing what we normally do."

Whether work, school or family, staying connected to our world and the people in it is the best way to make it through a case of the blahs, the blues, the doldrums or whatever you want to call it. ■

Barbi Walker is a freelance writer and an award-winning journalist. Barbi lives in Phoenix with her husband and young son.



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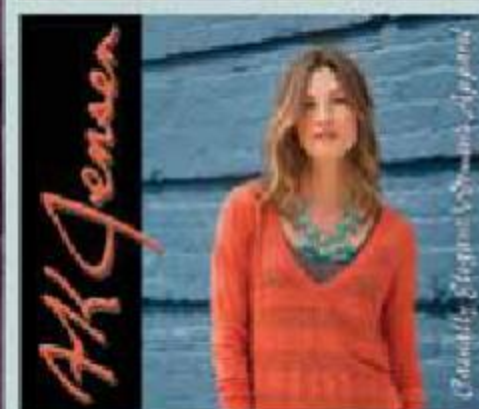
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